

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 15086 251029Z

12

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 IO-10

OMB-01 /074 W

----- 065470

R 250826Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8399

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

COMUSMACT BKK TH

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 15086

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, CB

SUBJ: NEW THAI CONTACT WITH CAMBODIA

REF: BANGKOK 14830

SUMMARY: A LOW-LEVEL THAI OFFICIAL AND A CAMBODIAN OFFICIAL OF UNDETERMINED STATUS MET JULY 25. THEY AGREED TO HOLD TALKS IN THE FUTURE ON DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND TRADE. THE PRESS EXAGGERATED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENCOUNTER.

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. UPI IS CARRYING AN EXCLUSIVE STORY RECOUNTING A MEETING JULY 25 BETWEEN THAI AND CAMBODIAN OFFICIALS, WHICH ITS REPORTER ATTENDED, 100 METERS INSIDE CAMBODIAN TERRITORY FROM THE THAI BORDER TOWN OF ARANYAPRATHET. ORGANIZED AT KHMER INITIATIVE THE NIGHT BEFORE, THE ONE HOUR MEETING ON THE 25TH WAS THE FIRST OFFICIAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE. THE TEN-MAN THAI DELEGATION HEADED BY DISTRICT OFFICER CHEMNONG U-PO JOINED A THREE-MAN CAMBODIAN TEAM LED BY HAK SRENG, DESCRIBED AS A 35-YEAR OLD FORMER PHNOM PENH SCHOOLTEACHER.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 15086 251029Z

2. IN THEIR STATEMENTS, CHEMNONG TOLD THE OTHER SIDE

(A) HE INFORMED THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR THE MEETING WAS TO TAKE PLACE, (B) THE THAI WOULD BE GLAD TO SEE THE BORDER OPEN, AND (C) HE BELIEVED THE RTG WOULD BE WILLING TO SELL MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND FUEL TO CAMBODIA. HAK SRENG, IDENTIFYING HIMSELF AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TRADE MISSION THAT THE MILITARY COMMITTEE I PHNOM PENH APPOINTED, SAID HE CAME FROM THERE WITH MILITARY PERMISSION. HE DECLARED CAMBODIA'S WILLINGNESS TO PROMOTE TRADE WITH THAILAND, AND SAID THAT HE HAD HEARD THE RTG WANTED TO HAVE CONTACT WITH HIS GOVERNMENT THROUGH DIPLOMATIC TIES. HAK SRENG SAID HE WOULD CONVEY THE MESSAGE TO HIS GOVERNMENT. HE SAID CAMBODIA WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BOTH TRADE AND DIPLOMATIC TIES, THE LATTER BEING THE FIRST PRIORITY.

3. THE REMAINDER OF THE FORMAL PART OF THE MEETING DEALT WITH DISCUSSION ABOUT FUTURE MEETINGS, MENTIONING PHNOM PENH, BATTAMBANG, AND POIPET AS POSSIBLE LOCATIONS. HAK SRENG SAID THAT HE COULD NOT SAY WHO WOULD REPRESENT HIS GOVERNMENT AT THE NEXT MEETING, THAT THEY AGREED ONLY IN PRINCIPLE THAT THERE WOULD BE TALKS, AND THAT NEXT TIME THE TWO SIDES MET, THE CAMBODIANS WOULD INFORM THE THAI OF THE LOCATION OF THE MAIN MEETING AND IDENTIFY THE CAMBODIAN REPRESENTATIVE. CHEMNONG SAID HE THOUGHT THE FIRST MEETING SHOULD BE HELD AT POIPET, THE RTG WOULD PROBABLY BE ABLE TO INFORM CAMBODIA OF ITS DESIRES BY MID-AUGUST, AND ITS REPRESENTATIVE WOULD PROBABLY BE THE CHIEF OF THE FOREIGN DIVISION AT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.

4. IN INFORMAL CONVERSATION HAK SRENG TOLD THE THAI THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS CONDUCTING TRADE IN PHNOM PENH WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION, HE SAID THAT KHIEU SAMPHAN, HIS COUNTRY'S DEFENSE MINISTER AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, IS STILL ALIVE, WORKING ON NATIONAL DEFENSE. HAK SRENG SAID HE SEES HIM ALMOST EVERY DAY. HAK SRENG ADDED THAT "YOU WILL SOON KNOW WHO IS LIVING AND WHO DIED". END UNCLASSIFIED.

5. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. THEP THEWAKUN, CHIEF OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 15086 251029Z

SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HE BELIEVES THE PRESS GREATLY EXAGGERATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEETING. HE SAID THAT SUCH CONTACTS HAVE OCCURRED PERIODICALLY IN THE ARANYAPRATHET-POIPET BORDER AREA, AND THIS WAS MERELY ONE MORE OF THEM. MOREOVER, THIS IS NOT THE WAY TWO GOVERNMENTS ESTABLISH RELATIONS; RATHER, IT IS THROUGH THE USE OF OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS AND PEOPLE WITH PROPER

CREDENTIALS. IN ANY CASE, HE SAID THIS MINISTRY WILL STUDY THE RESULTS OF THE MEETING TO DETERMINE WHETHER THERE CAN BE USEFUL FOLLOW-UP. (WE WONDER WHETHER THEP'S NOSE MIGHT NOT BE OUT OF JOINT SOMEWHAT BECAUSE IT IS NOT HIS MINISTRY WHICH IS HAVING THE CONTACT WITH THE CAMBODIANS.)

6. UPI SUBSEQUENTLY ADVISED US ITS REPORTERS, IN USING THE TERM "FIRST OFFICIAL CONTACT WITH CAMBODIA", ACTUALLY MEANT THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST MEANINGFUL OFFICAL CONTACT.

7. THE ARTICLE HAS PROVIDED YET ANOTHER EXPLANATION OF KHIEU SAMPHAN'S WHEREABOUTS. WITH RESPECT TO THE BANGKOK POST STORY OF JULY 23 STATING THAT HE WAS DEAD (REFTEL), WE UNDERSTAND THE SOURCE WAS A NORTH VIETNAMESE BUSINESS-MAN WHO RECENTLY CROSSED THE BORDER AT ARANYAPRATHET. THE POST ITSELF WAS NOT SO SURE HOW SOLID THE STORY WAS, AND ADMITTED IT HAS ALSO HEARD THAT KHIEU SAMPHAN IS IN PEKING.

8. INTERESTINGLY, WHILE THE MEETING WAS BEING ARRANGED, ANOTHER BORDER INCIDENT OCCURRED. THIS TIME, IN KHLONG YAI DISTRICT AT THE SOUTHERN EXTREMITY OF THE THAI BORDER WITH CAMBODIA, 15 KC SOLDIERS CROSSED 300 METERS INTO THAILAND, KILLED A THAI WHO HAD RECENTLY FLED FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FRONTIER, AND WOUNDED THREE OTHERS BEFORE WITHDRAWING.

9. THE RTG DESIRES RELATIONS WITH ITS STRANGE NEIGHBOR, AND IS LIKELY TO PARTICIPATE EAGERLY IN FUTURE MEETINGS WITH THE CAMBODIANS. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TALKS THAT THIS TELEGRAM DISCUSSES MAY NOT LIVE UP TO UPI'S LYRIC DESCRIPTION.

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PAGE 04 BANGKO 15086 251029Z

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, TRADE, PRESS COMMENTS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO15086
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750257-0317
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750719/aaaaaqk.tel
Line Count: 154
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BANGKOK 14830
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <22 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW THAI CONTACT WITH CAMBODIA
TAGS: PFOR, TH, CB, (CHEMNONG U-PO), (HAK SRENG)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006